

[As Long As You Love Me](#) by [Luddleston](#)

Category: Our Flag Means Death (TV)

Genre: Canon Compliant, Canon-Typical Violence, Cuddling & Snuggling, Fluff, Homoerotic stabbing, Injury Recovery, Love at First Sight, M/M, Mutual Pining, Sharing a Bed, Yearning, bandaging each other's wounds but in a gay way, everything is homoerotic aboard the Revenge, homoerotic classical literature, spoilers through ep 6

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Summary:

Ed is a complicated man with uncomplicated desires.

Stede leaned back in the chair. "That's what I want. A chosen companion, in life, in death, and in love."

As he let that hang, Ed felt as if he'd been stabbed twice—once in the gut, and once in the heart. Stede Bonnet was going to be his mortal wound.

What would it take for Ed to get Stede to choose him?

As Long As You Love Me

Author's Note:

- For [miraculan](#).

While the auxiliary wardrobe thing was the first ofmd fic I finished, this was the first one I started, so I must say here and now, my eternal thanks to Icky for getting me to watch this show and then for subsequently being down when I pop into Discord like 'I have a question about Edward Teach's inner thoughts'. I gift this to you.

Once again, this features Stede being into classical literature, because I'm into classical literature, and it tickles me that Stede Bonnet could also have been obsessed with all the queer nonsense that goes on in the Iliad.

I was very tempted to make them kiss at the last scene but I wanted to keep it canon-compliant for once in my life.

It was love at first sight. Probably.

Ed didn't really know what 'love at first sight' entailed, but he'd imagine it was something akin to the way he felt when he first saw his flag—Blackbeard's flag—snapping in the wind high up on the mast.

That was just how he felt when he saw Stede Bonnet, hanging like, well, not a flag, like a man in a noose. Like the hanged man inked on Ed's arm. Cutting him down, watching him gasp up, "*you've heard of me?*" stirred something in Ed he'd not felt... maybe since Blackbeard's flag first went up.

So, not love, then.

Obsession. Fascination. Infatuation.

Call it whatever you like. The Gentleman Pirate probably had a word for it in all those books he had shelved on the other side of the room.

Ed hadn't got a chance to look at any of those, not that it would do him much good. It was more the novelty of a floating library he was interested in. But he'd not bothered. Ed, instead, was at Stede Bonnet's bedside like some sort of nurse, although he doubted most nurses would smoke a pipe and put their boots up on a man's sickbed.

Bonnet called out over and over for 'Mary'. Seemed half-haunted by her, as if Mary was a ghost sitting on his chest, trying to drag him to the Underworld. Over and over he cried, a man tormented.

"*Mary...*" Another plaintive whimper.

Ed leaned on, planting a hand in the mattress beside Stede's hip. "Who's this Mary, then?"

Bonnet was battling something, that much was certain. He called himself a coward, thrashed around in bed (as much as a man so injured could thrash), cried out in wordless terror. *Don't drag him away, Mary, whatever sort of spirit you are. I need a chance to meet him properly.*

Ed really *was* acting the part of the nurse now, laying a cool rag on Bonnet's head and watching over him while he struggled. And, in keeping with that picture, it was a gentle touch that finally woke his Gentleman Pirate.

Bonnet's first concern was for his crew. That was how Ed knew, straightaway, that he might have been a shit pirate, but he was a good captain.

It was only after Ed reassured him that his crew was fine and warned him against moving about that Bonnet thought to wonder who was looming over his bed like the world's beardiest nursemaid.

Ed was half-insulted to hear Bonnet ask, "do you work for Blackbeard?"

He thought it over. If someone lords over you, if all your life is subject to him, then isn't that working for him? Ed worked for Blackbeard, then.

Hmm.

"I'm Ed." That'd suffice.

A sweaty, limp hand in his—Bonnet may have been half-dead but a gentleman pirate didn't back down from a handshake. It'd probably have been a firm one, if not for all the shakiness that came with injury.

"Hey. Stede."

No title, no 'Captain', not even a surname. Of course, Ed knew all those already. But it was goddamn refreshing.

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Ed lost count of how many near-death experiences he'd gone through years ago. It was all old hat by now. Life flashing before your eyes got boring after you'd seen it four or five times, especially when your life was a repetitive reel of violence. Sometimes, he thought he was asking something to take him out, daring the gods. *Come at me. I'm fuckin' Blackbeard. Just try it.*

That said, it took a lot of adrenaline to get his heart pumping.

One day with Stede Bonnet, *one fucking day*, and Ed had already felt more of a rush than the last several years of naval battles had afforded him. He leaned over the edge of the crow's nest, whisper-shouting down at the crew who were whisper-celebrating back, then loudly celebrating, then shushing one another. Ed leaned into Stede Bonnet (still dressed in Blackbeard's leathers and still a little pale and clammy from his own brush with death) and called out, "*we fucking did it!*"

The two of them sank back against the mast, watching the remains of their rigged-up little lighthouse spin round and round. Without Stede spitting

liquor into the fire, it was starting to dim, only the slightest reflections glancing off the mirror.

"Reckon we're getting down from here soon?" Ed asked.

"Oh, god, I can't even move," Stede sighed. He had a hand pressed over the wound on his side. "I'll just sleep up here, thanks. Get my strength back before I do something so wild as climbing back down the rigging."

"Yeah, alright."

"You're welcome to the captain's quarters, though," Stede offered. Like Ed was going to pop back down and go take a rest on that fancy bed while Stede sat up here.

"You kidding? And leave this perfectly fuckin' lovely night to you? Nah, man, I'm good right here." Ed patted his thighs, leaned his head back against the mast. "I'm good right here." Besides, the mast against his back was as comfortable as any bed he'd ever had, and the heavy fog as cozy as any blanket.

"Well, do be aware that I snore dreadfully. Don't say I never warned you."

"Can't hear shit over the waves. Get some rest, Captain. You've earned it."

In the morning, Stede brought him bread and marmalade. Breakfast in bed, except the bed was a crow's nest. Stede was still in Ed's clothes, even though god knows Stede had a selection of his own to choose from. If he noticed Ed watching the way he looked in black leather and morning light, Stede didn't say anything.

Stede said he eschewed additional gunpowder for fuckin' *marmalade storage*.

The man was insane. Ed couldn't help but watch his every move. And in that moment, he'd do whatever it took to stay at Stede Bonnet's side. Even telling Izzy he'd definitely for sure murder this guy and steal his identity and his ship and give Izzy the *Queen Anne*. Yeah, right.

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The Revenge was a small craft, with just enough space for Stede's crew. Adding four more men atop that number was pushing bunking space to its limits. Two of Stede's crewmen (one crewman and one crew-pirate-of-nonspecific-gender) had a claim on one of the bunkrooms, and the other, which mostly served as marmalade storage, had been given to Blackbeard's men, keeping things as even as could be.

Ed didn't like sharing a room with Fang, because Fang talked in his sleep and said shit that was absolutely terrifying half the time. Besides, he'd get Izzy in a tizzy (hah) if he bunked down with Stede, and he liked making Izzy pop that vein in his forehead.

And so, he proclaimed, "I'm gonna sleep here on your couch," which Stede said was quite alright.

Except, they didn't really do much sleeping. This was because Ed had asked Stede what his favorite of his books was, which prompted a lengthy discussion on the pros and cons of various authors, a debate Stede mostly had with himself, because Ed's literary knowledge was shoddier than Stede's fencing prowess.

"...while at times, can be rather dry, *this* volume is particularly intriguing," Stede said, setting yet another book on the table that sat between his couch and his chaise lounge.

"You're not expecting me to read all these, are you?" Ed asked, looking at the ever-growing pile.

"Well. No." Stede turned around to look at his handiwork, six whole books, each one thicker than the last, stacked up crooked on the table. "I suppose that would be a long reading list, especially for somebody as busy as yourself."

Yeah, and there was that other little hitch, too.

"Stede. It's not just that." He'd never felt odd about admitting this, but Stede took literacy as a given, and Ed didn't want to seem less than ordinary in front of him. Whatever. "Can't read, mate."

"What?" Stede squawked it out, like 'wot?'

"Never went to school."

Stede, who had gone to all sorts of school, who had schooling to spare, did not give Ed the expected look-down-the-nose, nor did he mention how *impressed* he was that Ed managed to have a whit of intelligence without the ability to read letters on a page.

Instead, Stede gave a rueful laugh and ran his hand over the cover of the book in his hands. "You'd think I'd learn not to assume this sort of thing," he said. "Did you know, I offered my entire crew use of this library whenever they like, without realizing that the only literate one of them is Lucius? I felt like a bit of a boor. And here I go again! I'm sorry."

"S fine."

He sat beside Ed on the sofa. "Well. Which one of those sounded most interesting? I can read it aloud, if you like?"

Only about an hour ago, Stede had been up on deck, reading his crew a story at sunset. Apparently, he did this every evening when they anchored, and Ed had been informed he'd missed a hell of a tale about a wooden boy.

"You don't have to," Ed told him. "I'm sure it grows... tiring."

"On the contrary, my good man, you must be aware by now that I enjoy the sound of my own voice." Stede poured himself another glass of the wine they'd been enjoying, and that was that.

"Well. The one about the... the houses divided, and the two dumbass kids falling in love with each other, that sounded sort of funny."

"Romeo and Juliet? Well, I warn you, it is a tragedy," Stede said. He pulled a medium-sized book from among the stack and then leaned back on the

couch, opening it up.

"All the best things are." Ed caught a glimpse of the first page, which looked like it was inscribed with some sort of etching of a castle. "Does it have pictures?"

"Yes!" Stede chirped, "this is an illustrated version! They're quite lovely, if you'd like to look at them whilst I read?"

"Yeah. I mean, I'm not much for lovely art, either, but yeah. Sure."

This prompted Stede to wedge himself closer to Ed's side, laying the book open so that the front cover was on Stede's lap and the back cover was on Ed's. It was only natural, in that case, for Ed to put an arm around Stede. He inhaled deep, but his breath caught halfway.

"You smell like flowers," he said under his breath.

"Mm. It's my soap. Lavender," Stede said. "You're welcome to try it sometime, if you like."

"Lavender. Huh." He rolled the word around in his mouth. Ed was used to harsh, unscented soap that dried out his skin whenever he had the occasion to bathe, which wasn't often anyhow. Usually just when he got enough dirt on him to warrant a spot cleaning. Stede had a tub, though, and he bathed for fun, and he put little flowers in the water. "Smells like it would taste good."

"It would not, it is still very much soap." Stede had this bemused little curl to his lip, and Ed was proud to have put it there. He'd always known he had a good sense of humor, and it'd been absolutely wasted on humorless bastards like Izzy. "But there are these lavender biscuits I'm fond of. Now. Stop distracting me."

"Perish the thought," Ed gave his best Stede impersonation. It made Stede give him a playful little slap on the knee.

Any other man tried to smack him like that, Ed would've had him in a headlock. But he just laughed and leaned a little more heavily into Stede.

He'd been close to somebody like this before. Pressed up against a lover in the dark, pressed up against a crewmate in a foxhole, pressed up against an enemy as he squeezed the life out of them until they dropped unconscious.

This was different. There was something uniquely comfortable about leaning against Stede on his couch, in front of the fireplace, with Stede's steady, musical voice reading out the opening lines to a play Ed had never seen, but could imagine when Stede gave such voice and life to all the characters.

When he stopped reading, it wasn't by choice, but because he had to yawn, their long day of pillaging and plundering having worn down even Stede's irrepressible energy. He sighed, leaning his head back against Ed's arm.

"Shall we go to bed?"

"Only if you promise there's more to come tomorrow," Ed told him.

"I swear," Stede said. "Are you going to sleep on my couch?" He did not move from Ed's side.

"Yes," Ed said, and then after a moment of faltering, "if that's alright." Izzy would laugh at him for saying something like that, would tell him he'd gone soft. But it wasn't about going soft, it was about Ed having finally found somebody he respected, and now Stede's opinion of Ed carried weight.

"Of course, my dear fellow, if you can sleep through my snoring, you're welcome anytime."

Stede's snoring was one of the calmest things he'd ever had to sleep through, so that wasn't any trouble, really.

The trouble was in watching Stede putter about his nightly routine, putting the books back in their proper places on the shelves, banking the fire, popping into his en-suite and coming back out in a nightshirt (soft, white,

terribly thin) and that silly little nightcap (because Bonnet is the only pirate Ed knew of who'd ever wear a nightcap). The trouble was in sharing a nightcap of a different variety with him, a good old-fashioned glass of brandy before bed. There was a *routine* for them to follow.

It was *terribly* domestic.

Ed took off his jacket and his boots so he wouldn't get dirt on Stede's pretty cushions. Imagine that. *Blackbeard* breaking his usual habit of sleeping with one eye open, ready to pounce at a moment's notice. His pistol wasn't even within reach. All he had was a knife at his belt.

Stede opened a trunk and from it, pulled a thick quilt with bright yellow tassels on all the edges. And then—oh, *shitfuckingdammit*— he draped it over Ed's curled-up form (the couch wasn't long enough to sleep stretched out). Terribly, horribly domestic. Ed could scream.

"Sleep well, Edward," said Stede, blowing out the last of the candles.

"Yeah." Ed cleared his throat. "Yeah. Goodnight."

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Stede was fretting. Unnecessarily.

Ed was just a little bit stabbed up. Nowhere near as bad as Stede had been on their first encounter, because Stede had taken that Spanish dagger in the middle of his belly, and it had been a big, inelegant knife instead of the slim blade of a rapier. Plus there was the 'nearly hung to death' bit of that occasion.

"Seriously, man." Ed dropped the jacket, which he'd already half-stripped off while he was teasing Stede, anyhow. "My guts aren't going anywhere, I'm fine."

"Your *guts* may be fine, but this is a *pirate ship*, Ed, it's not exactly *hygienic*." Stede threw his hands up in the air, making his frilly cuffs flutter. "What if it gets infected?"

Ed sat down on the couch with a little grunt of pain, pulling off his shirt and then pressing the fabric to the wound to stop the bleeding. It'd stop. He wasn't much of a bleeder, anyway, unless he was drunk, which he wasn't.

"What if I *kill* you?" Stede continued to worry, bringing over a basin of water and a rag, so that he could clean the wound for Ed.

Honestly, Ed didn't think it'd be the worst fate to die at the hands of Stede Bonnet. It'd be poetic, almost. But Stede would be terribly upset. "It's not gonna kill me. Takes more than that to kill me."

Stede's hands were shaking. He slipped off the ring he was wearing and set it on the couch cushion. He closed his eyes and took a breath, and then his hands steadied. Ed felt a bloom of pride—he'd taught him that. Stede dipped the rag into the water, instructing Ed to move his makeshift rag so that Stede could dab at his wound, which, honestly, only made it sting worse.

"And now you've gone and gotten blood all over your shirt."

"S why I wear black, mate." He was holding said shirt awkwardly, somewhere in the vicinity of his knee, because he didn't want to get blood on Stede's sofa. It was not black, it was pink, and while Ed's blood would currently blend in with the floral print, once it dried, it'd be an ugly stain. "Seriously, Stede, this is the most medical attention any of my wounds have ever received, save for the times somebody's had to sew me back up."

"This probably should be sutured, I'll get Roach."

"No, it shouldn't." Ed plucked up the ring, which Stede had set on the cushions, slipping it onto his own finger for safekeeping. He'd always liked this one, with the square turquoise stone. "You see all those holes in me? None of them ever got stitched, and I'm fine." Granted, the collection of pockmarks from previous stabbings was a bit obscured with blood right now, but Stede had seen them when Ed pulled up his shirt to show him how to cleverly take a running-through.

Honestly, he'd mostly done it to show off. In pirate culture, that was basically the ultimate display of manliness and sensuality. Given the end of the particular rope Ed was at, he was either gonna ask Stede to stab him or ask Stede to fuck him, and given Stede's proper upbringing, the stabbing was probably less objectionable. They'd work up to the other thing.

Ed let Stede tilt him forward so he could dab at the exit wound, which was basically a *pinprick*, hardly needed so much attention, and then he sat up straight like a good little patient while Stede pressed gauze to his injuries and bound him up in clean white bandages.

All the while, Stede tutted and clucked at him like a mother hen. "I simply cannot believe you. Frightening the living daylights out of me like that. It's a good job you've got me to patch you up after you got me to wound you."

"I'd be fine. I'm tough," Ed argued, while Stede went from cleaning his wound to cleaning the rest of him, taking the bloody shirt from him and dropping it in the basin, then wiping his hands clean with the cloth, soaking it in the water again, and moving to clean off Ed's hands, as well.

"Oh, yes, extremely tough, but that doesn't mean you've got to prove it all the time." He'd begun lecturing Ed, the way he lectured Wee John and Black Pete when they started wrestling on deck. Ed had never been on a crew that didn't have an extremely defined pecking order based on who could beat who in a fight (always with Ed at the lead) but Stede really did run his ship differently. "When did you steal my ring?"

"While you were dithering over this little scratch like a doting mother," Ed said. He patted himself on the fresh wound and didn't wince. "Caught you unawares." He started working the ring off his finger.

"Keep it," Stede offered. "Perhaps it can serve as a reminder next time you do something stupid to get yourself hurt."

"Probably won't work," Ed warned him.

"Well, then it'll simply look nice. Come on, can you stand? Let's get you to bed."

"Already on the couch," Ed said, leaning back.

"No, no. You're taking the bed tonight, I'm not letting an injured man sleep all curled-up on the couch." Stede extended a hand to him, pulling him to his feet. He made a whiny, pained little noise that had Stede honest-to-god rolling his eyes. "So very tough. You ooze masculinity."

"I'm not turned on enough to do that right now," Ed joked.

Stede either didn't catch the joke or didn't acknowledge it, and instead he began hustling Ed off to bed, which Ed really wished was happening under other circumstances. Damn. It'd been too long. But sex had become like piracy lately, nobody was doing anything interesting. There was no thrill, no energy, no fuckin' *life*.

Stede Bonnet tucked him into bed, and Ed's heart did more knocking about in his ribcage than it had during his last four knife fights. Combined.

"Your bed's too soft," he complained. The couch was already too soft, but this was like sleeping on a bunch of clouds. "What's in here? Feathers?"

"Yes, it's a down mattress," Stede said. "Now. Shall I sit by your side like you did when first we met?"

"No, that won't work. Last time you tried a pull of my pipe you almost coughed up a lung." He'd gone bright red doing it, too. It was funny.

"I wasn't going to smoke while I did it."

"Then that ruins the similarities. You have to smoke and put your boots up on the bed and study my face with catlike intensity," Ed instructed him. Perhaps that let on a bit too much. He'd blame it on the blood loss.

"And what'll you do?" Stede asked.

"Sleep. Thrash about. Whimper a little."

Stede shook his head ruefully. "Was I really that pathetic?" he asked.

Ed laid his forearm over his eyes. "Nah, man. You were fighting. Thought the spirits were gonna pull you under with them, but you made it. It was like there was something you had to live for."

"To see you."

Ed dropped his arm, got eyes on Stede just in time to see him looking at his lap with a little shake of his head.

"I didn't know who you were, but *you* knew *me*. And you didn't just know Mr. Stede Bonnet of Barbados, you knew *the Gentleman Pirate*. You knew me how I wanted to be known. And I had to know who you were."

Ed rested his hands across his chest, like Stede's had been when he was lying here injured. "You know, I asked you a question while you were unconscious. You didn't hear me, it's alright, but I was wondering if you'd tell me now."

"What is it?" Stede touched Ed's wrist, the same way Ed had touched him, just before he saw those warm brown eyes open. Stede looked so much livelier now, pink and sun-tanned, his hair fluffy and bouncy, not pale and sweaty.

"Who's Mary?" Ed repeated himself, and then had to elaborate, for the sake of context. "You were saying her name in your sleep."

The hand on Ed's wrist squeezed. "Ah. I was dreaming of her, in my sorry state. Remembering. She is— *was*— my wife."

Was? "She dead?"

"No! God, I hope she's alive and well." Stede turned his head to look at the painting on the wall by the bed. "You're going to think I'm terrible."

Ed remembered him saying, '*a lighthouse. I should've been one for my family*'. "There's not a lot that could make me think anybody's terrible. I'm fuckin' Blackbeard."

Stede gave a half-hearted little shrug, as if to say, *true*. "I left her. And our children. I just... I couldn't bear that life any longer. I never wanted to marry Mary—hah, marry Mary—she's a nice enough woman, but... I didn't choose her."

Ed had never married, himself. Never would. That wasn't the sort of life he'd lead, and nobody'd ever expect him to. "If you did choose somebody, who would it be?"

Stede leaned back in the chair, and then, in a mimicry of what Ed had done two weeks ago, put his feet up on the bed. He was in stockings, not boots. Ed rested a hand on his ankle. "When I was younger, I studied Latin. I used to read a lot of ancient texts—the Romans, and the Greeks. I read about all sorts of men who had beloved companions who they shared more with than any woman, who they went to war alongside, and who they lay down their lives for. That's what I want. A chosen companion, in life, in death, and in love."

As he let that hang, Ed felt as if he'd been stabbed twice—once in the gut, and once in the heart. Stede Bonnet was going to be his mortal wound.

"Anyway, that's what I want. Not a woman who doesn't want me, either." He nudged his toe against Ed's thigh. "Seems like a rather piratical desire, yes?"

"Yeah. Yeah, it really is." He patted Stede's ankle. "You fit in with us better than you think, Gentleman Pirate."

"You flatter me, Ed." Stede slipped his feet off the bed and stood, clasping Ed's shoulder. "Get some sleep. I'll want to check on that injury in the morning."

"Aye, Captain," Ed sighed, turning his head to watch Stede retreat to carry out his usual nightly routine, with the added step of getting rid of the bloody remains of Ed's little stunt.

A chosen companion. In life, in death, in love.

What would it take for Ed to get Stede to choose him?

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Ed was Blackbeard and Blackbeard was the Kraken and the Kraken was a monster.

In short: Ed was a monster.

And Stede was carefully prying him out of the bathtub like peeling an octopus' suckers off a rock, arm by cruel, tentacle-y arm.

If Ed was the devil itself, he wondered if Stede was some sort of angel, but Ed didn't believe in angels. If he did, he'd have to come to the conclusion that all the angels out there ignored him, and ignored his poor mother, god rest her soul, and left them to the hands of the Monster, Senior, and he couldn't abide by that.

"Come now, Edward, come to bed," Stede told him, gentle as a spring breeze, pulling him into the cabin (still dimly lit from the evening's Fuckery) and drawing him close to his side, hip to hip.

Ed couldn't believe he'd almost gotten rid of this beautiful, wonderful person. Stede sat them on the bed together and drew the curtains shut around it.

"That's it, there's a good man. Here." He pulled Ed's head onto his shoulder, put his arms around him, and rocked him like Ed was a fuckin' baby, and Ed cried like he was one, too.

He wasn't sure how long they rested like that. Maybe hours, pressed together in the dark, Ed crying and Stede gentling, always gentle, his Gentleman Pirate. Gentle enough that he could handle the crushed and stomped-on remains of Ed's heart. Maybe even put it back together. Ed cried hard enough that his belly hurt where Stede had run him through and his heart hurt where Stede had metaphorically pierced him.

Stede taught him about metaphors.

“Edward,” Stede sighed. “Oh, Edward.”

Ed didn’t like his full name from most people. When Izzy called him Edward, it meant 'you fuckin’ twat', but when Stede called him Edward, it just meant 'Edward'. When Stede called him Edward, it meant Edward was enough on his own. When Izzy called him Edward, it meant he wasn't good enough to be Blackbeard.

Shit.

Izzy.

Izzy was on the deck, and Izzy finished all the jobs Edward didn’t have the stomach for and all the jobs Blackbeard wasn’t enough of a monster to handle.

Izzy was gonna finish Stede.

“Well, dear, we ought to head upstairs soon,” Stede said, “I want to commend the crew in a truly excellent Fuckery, but possibly give them some footnotes for next time. We’ll need to think of a new finale, a gentleman never uses the same finale twice, especially when it causes such distress in his companions.”

He was pulling away from Ed, standing up, and Ed wanted to warn him, wanted to kill Izzy for him.

But Stede had just met the Kraken. Izzy had been in bed with the monster for years. Izzy knew the monster at its worst, at its most disgusting. He knew the sort of things that would turn Stede’s stomach, and he was loyal despite it. Ed couldn’t lose him.

"Come with me?" Stede asked him.

"Yeah, of course. Gotta give them a round of applause for that Fuckery," Ed said, his tone missing some lightness.

He kept his hand on his gun all the way up the stairs and onto the deck.

Just try it, Hands, you fucking dickface.

— — —

The sun was up before they managed to get Stede off the mast, where he'd been pinned like a wanted poster with a dart through it. They needed Fang to do it, which had only happened after Fang was done crying over Lucius' missing finger.

("The hands of an artist!")

"Is somebody gonna tell him I'm right-handed, or...?")

Once Stede was released, he collapsed into Ed's waiting arms, and Ed figured Stede would have little problem with being scooped up and carried down to his cabin. It was the same way he'd arrived when Ed first rescued him from the Spanish. Granted, Stede had been a little too unconscious to complain back then.

"I'm sorry," Ed told him, soon as they were past the doors and headed below deck.

"For what? You're—haha—carrying me like a princess, I don't mind," Stede said, a little strained.

"For Izzy. I thought was gonna try something, but I didn't think he was gonna fuckin' challenge you to a fuckin' duel."

"You and Izzy have both really got to branch out your adjectives."

Stede hissed out a wounded little noise as Ed set him down. *Shit*. What did Stede do when he took care of Ed? Goddammit, it'd been barely over twenty-four hours ago. The wound still ached from carrying Stede downstairs. Right. Bandages. The wash basin in the en-suite. Ed went for it.

"I should've stopped him earlier. Should've shot him. Should've stabbed him," Ed grumbled, pouring the water from the silver pitcher and hurrying

back into the room with it. Now Stede was the one sitting on the couch holding an open wound.

"Nah, that'd be breaking the rules of engagement. A gentleman never lets somebody else interrupt his duels," said Stede, who hadn't even done *any* duels before today, and therefore had no fuckin' idea what a gentleman did about them.

Ed helped him pull off the black shirt with the big fluffy collar, which resulted in another series of half-agonized groans. He really had taken the sword in the right spot, though. Ed wished he'd been a little faster, dodged out of the way so that Izzy got his sword stuck in the mast without the detour through Stede's flesh.

Ed knelt before him, cleaned up the blood. "You did get my note about wearing black, though. Nice." He dropped the shirt onto the floor.

His hands weren't very gentle, and Stede kept squirming, so this clearly worked much better when they were in the opposite positions. That was fine. Ed'd get stabbed a hundred times for Stede to patch him up.

Stede leaned his hands on Ed's shoulders, gripping so tight his nails dug in on one side and the leather creaked on the other. "You've got this," Ed told him. "You got worse from the Spaniards and you healed up from that no problem, so don't worry about this. You'll be on your feet and captaining by tomorrow. Want me to, uh, get Roach to sew it?"

"No, I think it'll be alright. And besides, I've seen the results of Roach's sewing jobs. I think they actually make the scarring worse."

Having been proudly shown Roach's shoulder earlier, Ed could concur. "Alright, then, let's bandage it up. Get you good as new. Sort of." The wound was actually neater than the one in Ed's stomach had been, because Stede hadn't swooned after the blow, which was good, because he'd only had the sword and the mast to hold him up. Ed was mostly at fault for that because he'd fallen into Stede's arms on purpose.

Alright. Last bit. Clean off their hands. Ed usually just wiped his on his pants, but Stede had taken care, and so Ed would take care in turn.

When he was done, he dropped the rag in the basin, not as neatly as Stede had, so some slightly-bloody water splashed out onto the table. And Ed was left with Stede's hand in his, the same one he'd pressed his forehead to in the bath in a desperate urge to be closer to the only person who made him feel human. He pressed his forehead there again, and whispered his apologies once more.

Stede stroked his hair and said he needn't say he's sorry.

Ed kissed his hand, right where the turquoise ring he'd pilfered should have rested.

But, he couldn't lie with his head on Stede's lap forever (mostly because his knees hurt), so he stood up and offered Stede a hand in getting to bed.

They lay side by side, matching left-hand-side stab wounds.

Ed looked over at Stede, and Stede was already looking back. That was the thing about Stede—whenever Ed looked at him, he was always looking back, whether it was over breakfast, across the ship, or amid a tender moment in the dark.

Ed winked.

Stede laughed—then he winced. "I don't think it's possible I'll be ready to go by tomorrow," he said.

"That's alright," Ed told him. "That's what you've got me for, yeah?"

"You take such good care of me, Edward."

He did. He would. Long as Stede would have him.

Author's Note:

Things in this that are show-canon based on little things that have been pointed out to me, and now I'm pointing them out to you:

1. Ed can't read, he gets Stede to read the letter aloud for him and he signs his name with an X
2. They really do switch rings! I'm not sure if I did it at the right point or not but I wasn't gonna go through looking for rings
3. Unless Stede was stabbed to that mast for a really long time, they actually did spend most of the night in Stede's cabin after the bathtub scene, because it's dusk when Ed goes downstairs and dawn at the end of the ep
4. Ed does actually seem to sleep on Stede's couch as far as I can tell. If this isn't true then that can be a little bit of canon divergence but it sure seems that way.

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